The background of the entire image is a traditional marbled paper pattern. It features large, flowing, organic shapes in shades of deep red, burnt orange, and forest green, all set against a cream or off-white base. The pattern has a sense of movement, with colors swirling and blending into each other.

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Boston  
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concerning the

general principles

of the subject.







A BRIEF SKETCH OF  
THE LIFE OF JAMES READ









JAMES READ  
1860

A BRIEF SKETCH OF THE LIFE OF  
**JAMES READ**

BY HIS GRANDSON  
**JAMES READ CHADWICK, M.D.**

A PAPER READ BEFORE THE  
HYDE PARK HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
APRIL 19, 1905



PRIVATELY PRINTED  
**The Merrymount Press, Boston**  
1905

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SILHOUETTE OF MR. JAMES READ

“CUT WITH SCISSORS BY MASTER HUBARD WITHOUT  
DRAWING OR MACHINE AT THE GALLERY OF  
CUTTINGS AND PANHARMONICON CONCERT ROOM”  
(1820-1830?)

A BRIEF SKETCH OF THE LIFE OF  
JAMES READ

1789-1870

**J**AMES READ, the fourth of the ten children of Joseph Stacy Read and Esther Goodwin, was born in Cambridge on November 19, 1789. He married Hannah Palmer, December 6, 1815. To them were born four daughters, of whom the two younger are still living, Mrs. Christopher C. Chadwick and Miss Sarah E. Read. Mr. Read died at the age of eighty-one years on December 24, 1870.

The records of the career of a business man who invariably shunned public office are not usually available half a century after he and all his contemporaries have been laid at rest. For this reason the task has been no light one to resurrect the salient features of my grandfather's life which made it seem fitting to his contemporaries that his name should be given to one portion of your town.

From a few records, several old letters and the



recollections of a few surviving members of the family, I have been able to gather a few episodes of his life which reveal better than words the stuff of which he was made.

When a lad I often drove to Cambridge with my grandfather, listening to, but unfortunately not recording, the stories of his youth in Cambridge. An early event of which he told was his purchase for two dollars, when fifteen or sixteen years old, of an eighth share of one ticket in the Harvard College Lottery, which ticket won the first prize of \$16,000, whereby he came into possession of \$2000. With the generosity which was characteristic of his whole life he devoted that sum to paying off his father's debts. His father, Joseph Stacy Read, was postmaster of Cambridge, whose salary must have been meagre for the support of a family of ten children.

I have tried to fix the date of this stroke of good luck. Quincy's *History of Harvard College* says that in 1772 the Legislature of Massachusetts first empowered the Commonwealth to conduct a lottery for the benefit of the Col-

lege for the period of four years, and that it reenacted the statute in 1794. In 1805 Stoughton Hall was built for the sum of \$23,700, of which \$18,400 was derived from the lottery. In 1806 the Legislature again gave permission to raise \$30,000 by lottery, whereby \$29,000 was obtained, with which Holworthy was built. From this date there is no further record of Harvard College Lotteries, so Mr. Read cannot have been older than seventeen years when he took this prize. It is interesting in this connection to look ahead a few years. In 1831 or 1832 a clerk in his employ committed suicide. An investigation of his accounts revealed the fact that he had appropriated \$20,000 of the firm's money and squandered it in lottery tickets. Mr. Read was so distressed over this tragedy, and so impressed thereby with the pernicious effect of lotteries, that he went to the Legislature and, by his personal efforts, secured the passage of an act in 1833 forbidding all lotteries in this Commonwealth. This was embodied in the Revised Statutes of 1836. At about this period he became clerk in

some store in Boston, walking to Boston from Cambridge every Monday morning with his bundle of clean linen over his shoulder, and walking out every Saturday evening with his bundle of soiled linen. He said that he passed but three houses between Harvard Square and Boston.

That his business capacity and energy must have developed early is made evident by this clipping from the *Boston Patriot* of November 20, 1811, in which he, as an independent trades-

### CANTON CRAPES, &c.

#### *JAMES READ,*

*Nos. 101 & 102, Court-Street, has just opened,*  
1 case Canton Crapes, of buff, lilac, black, slate, pink, crimson, &c. &c.

Plaid Lustrings; figured English Lustrings, of changeable green, orange, white, &c.

7-8 and 4-4 Irish Linens, from 50 cts. to 1.75 per yard. — Red Bandanna Handkfs.

Broadcloths, of mixtures of various qualities, blue, black, green, brown, olive, &c.

Cassimeres of various colors—Carpeting.

Olive and black Velvet;

Elegant Black Lace Shawls;

Black Lace Armlets; white cotton lace do.

—ALSO—

A complete assortment of American Manufactured Cotton GOODS—

Such as Gingham and Checks, equal to any imported, Stripes, Shirtings, Bed Tickings, Yarns, Threads, &c.

A small assortment of Muffs and Tippetts.

Nov 20

man, advertises his goods both foreign and domestic to the purchasing public.

Here is another advertisement taken from *The Columbian Centinel* of November 4, 1812.

<p style="text-align: center;">JAMES READ,  <i>Offers for sale.....at No. 101 and 102, Court-Street,</i>  <b>A</b> GREAT variety of fresh imported <b>BRITISH PIECE</b>  <b>GOODS...</b><i>among which are the following—</i></p>	
<p>2 cases SHAWLS, sizes fr.  4-4 to 8-4 square;  1 do brown Cottons;  2 do white Cambrics;  2 do 6-4 and 9-8 blk do;  1 do Shirting Cottons;  2 do Furnitures and  Copperplates;  1 do glazed Gingham  for Hat linings;  1 do colored Cambrics;  4 do FANCY MUSLINS,  cont'g pearls piquet,  whip and drop nett,  plain and spotted leno,  victory gauze, birds  eye, <i>patent nett</i>, spider  and lace, tambor'd sprig  and plain book;  Also  Leno, crape and lace  new half Hdkfs;  1 do 6-4 cambric Dim-  oties;  2 do white <i>Millinets</i>;  1 do 4-4 Irish Linens;  2 do figured cambric  Hdkfs;  6-4 white twill'd Shawls;  do lace muslin do;  Cotton Laces;  Kid Gloves;  Elegant fig'd Lace Arm-  letts;  English Silk Hosiery;  All of which are offered at a small advance, pr Piece  or Package.</p>	<p>2 bales, cont'g black,  brown, fawn, green,  French grey and scar-  let BOMBAZETTS;  2 bales FLANNELS;  1 do Duffills;  1 do Coatings;  2 do Broadcloths, assort-  ed colors;  1 do saved list blues;  2 do Cassimeres;  1 case single and mill'd  STOCKINETTS;  2 do worsted and cotton  HOSIERY, cont'g ladies  slate and black worst-  ed, slate, blk and white  cotton;  <i>Misses</i> slate and black  worsted, Gentlemen's  white, black and mixt  worsted, lambswool &amp;  angola;  <i>Sup. mill'd blk Cassimeres</i>;  Buttons;  Corded Violets;  8-4 cotton Damask;  Colored Cotton Balls;  Crimson and black Pe-  lisse Cloths;  White Royal Ribb;  Black Sattin Ribbons;  10 cases Calicoes;  1 do silk and cotton  Ginghams.</p>
6w	nov 4

In 1815 Mr. Read had so far prospered as to warrant his marriage. In this connection there is an unusual and romantic episode. My grandmother, when she married my grandfather, had, of necessity, to reject another suitor, John Pickins, who, instead of immediately marrying some other girl in his disappointment and making her and himself miserable for life, as so often happens, became the most devoted friend of both my grandfather and grandmother. For fifty years he participated in all the family dinners and reunions. He lived and died a bachelor; became extremely penurious, although he had acquired considerable property. I remember him distinctly, in the latter part of his life, at our Thanksgiving dinners, dressed in a shiny dress-coat that had survived at least a quarter of a century, the frayed bindings of which had been sewed over and over by him with white cotton thread. When he died, in the early sixties, he bequeathed half of his property to his nearest relatives (second cousins), and the other half as follows: to Mr. James Read and to Mrs. James





## Acrostic.

---

How blest'd the youth, whose kindred soul shall move  
A heart, like yours, to tenderness and love!  
Not Helen, when she seal'd the doom of Troy;  
Nor Venus, when she charm'd the Trojan boy,  
And stood expos'd to his admiring view;—  
Had brighter charms, or lovelier look'd, than you.

Pure and unsullied as the mountain snows,  
And fresh and blooming as the damask rose;  
Love in your eyes has fixt his brilliant throne,  
Making all hearts his soft dominion own.—  
Enchanting Fair! still nobler charms display,  
Replacing those, which Time shall steal away.

---



Read, each \$18,000; to each of their four children, \$9000, and to each of their six grandchildren, \$4500. It implies rare qualities in the successful suitor so completely to capture the esteem and friendship of the unsuccessful one.

The veracity of this episode is, in a measure, attested by the finding among her papers of this acrostic upon the name of my grandmother Hannah Palmer in the handwriting of Mr. Pickins.

In 1824 the *Boston Courier* of July 5 had an advertisement of the firm of James Read & Co., his associate being Horace Hall of Charlestown, New Hampshire, a silent partner who sup-

*Olive, Green, Claret, London Smoke, and Oxford mixt Broadcloths—Ribbed Cassimeres, &c.*

**J**AMES READ & CO. No. 3, Kilby-street, have for sale, received by the late arrivals, BROADCLOTHS, of superfine and middling quality, consisting of Claret, Olive, Oxford mixt, London Smoke, Brown, Fashionable Green, &c. ; extra fine Black, Blue, Claret, and Green do. ; extra fine Black Cassimeres ; Ribbed Cassimeres, of fashionable colours ; superfine Habit Cloths, for Gentlemen's summer wear ; fine twilled Black Bombazetts.

May 17.

is2m

plied capital only. At this time your townsman Henry Grew entered the office of James Read & Co.

In 1822 Mr. Read moved his growing family from Franklin Street, where for seven years he had been boarding with his mother-in-law, Jerusha Johnson Palmer, to West Roxbury. Here he resided for several years, but, owing to the time consumed in driving to and from the city daily to his business (the Providence railroad had not been built), he soon made his winter residence at 24 Franklin Place, Boston, continuing to pass his summers in West Roxbury until 1836-1837, when he sold that estate to Elisha Dyer, Jr. (?), of Providence.

It was at his West Roxbury home that he used to entertain Lorenzo Papanti and his Italian bride, recently arrived in this country. Mr. Papanti is familiarly known to all Bostonians of the last half century as the dancing-teacher who instructed three generations of the élite of Boston. His hall on Tremont Street has just (1904) been demolished to be replaced by a modern office building. It is recalled in the family that when Mrs. Papanti sang Italian songs after supper in West Roxbury, my grandmother would close

every window and shutter, lest some passer-by should overhear songs which at that day were thought to be shocking. On the day after my grandfather's death, Mr. Papanti called to see me, and, with his curly brown wig askew and tears running down his aged, furrowed cheeks, told me that Mr. Read had been the best friend he had had in this country, recalling occasions on which he had helped him out of many difficulties, financial and otherwise.

In 1837, a year remarkable for the failure of many of the long-established commercial houses of the country, as President of the Globe Bank, Mr. Read was a member of the committee representing the different banks, which reported in favor of suspending specie payments. In 1842 the firm of James Read & Co. found themselves so involved as to be obliged to stop payment. I can best describe this crucial event in Mr. Read's career by quoting a paragraph in the *Boston Courier* of October 5, 1844.

“ A FAILURE happened in this city yesterday to a large  
 “ amount—unexpected probably, unless to a very few. The

“annunciation of the fact produced, generally, such indications of sympathy and regret as we seldom witness on similar occasions. The gentleman who is at the head of the establishment has long been known and esteemed as one of the most open, generous, upright merchants in the community. When such men fail, society suffers. But the gentleman to whom we allude does not fail. He may suffer a transient eclipse, in consequence of embarrassments in trade; but he has a capital in his character, which will carry him triumphantly through the storm. We believe in his integrity—we know the generosity of his disposition, and the nobleness of his soul—and we trust in the sympathies of an intelligent and generous community to sustain and console him in this day of misfortune, and to encourage him in any attempt he may make to recover the independence and the affluence he deserves.

“This paragraph was published in the *Courier* of March 18, 1842. We republish it as a text, which needs no other comment than the following statement:—

“The assignee in bankruptcy of the estate of the late firm of James Read and Company, having completed the liquidation of said estate, has notified the creditors that he shall this day pay a final dividend. The amount

“ which this firm owed at the time of its fail-  
 “ ure in the spring of 1842 was about \$850,000.  
 “ The sales and collections made by Mr. Morey,  
 “ the assignee, have produced in cash nearly  
 “ \$800,000, by which he is enabled to pay the  
 “ debts proved, within an amount somewhat  
 “ over \$50,000. Such a result as this has rarely  
 “ happened in the settlement of a bankrupt es-  
 “ tate. Both partners received, sometime since,  
 “ a full and honorable discharge, and we now  
 “ learn that the active partner, Mr. James Read,  
 “ has added to what has thus been realized from  
 “ the assets of the concern a sum exceeding  
 “ FIFTY THOUSAND DOLLARS, being the earnings  
 “ of a prosperous commission business during  
 “ the past two and a half years, by means whereof  
 “ every creditor of said firm will receive a hun-  
 “ dred cents on a dollar of the amount of his  
 “ debt, as proved by him against said estate, and  
 “ allowed by the court.  
 “ When we consider the great amount of the  
 “ debts of said firm, and of the cash realized from  
 “ the assets, being nearly \$800,000, and also



“the large sum now voluntarily furnished by  
 “Mr. Read, being the whole of his subsequent  
 “earnings, acquired, too, by intense application  
 “to business; and when, also, we consider the  
 “extraordinary success of his efforts in accu-  
 “mulating so large a sum since the date of his  
 “misfortunes, and his willingness now, a second  
 “time, to dispossess himself entirely of property,  
 “for so honorable a purpose, we must pronounce  
 “this a case almost without a parallel in the  
 “history of this, or any other mercantile com-  
 “munity.

“This intelligence, we believe, will be as grati-  
 “fying to the merchants and men of busi-  
 “ness in our city, as the facts are honorable to  
 “Mr. Read.”

The following letters are self-explanatory.

*“Boston, October 4th, 1844*

“MY DEAR SIR: As a Merchant of Boston, I  
 “have hardly words to express the deep sense  
 “of obligation I entertain for the noble exam-

“ple of personal integrity and honor you have  
 “presented to the world.

“The moral lesson taught by this example sheds  
 “a lustre on the Mercantile character of which  
 “I am truly proud. I thank you for myself, and  
 “I thank you for the Merchants who are asso-  
 “ciated with us in the wily paths of commerce.

“I feel deeply the admirable tribute paid to our  
 “profession, especially since it comes from one  
 “who has been my neighbor and associate for  
 “nearly thirty years, during which period not a  
 “stain has ever rested upon his character. This  
 “last proof of devotion to virtue and honor  
 “places you before the public as one possessing  
 “the true attributes of a *Man*. I wish this act  
 “of homage to personal honor might be written  
 “in letters of gold, and impressed on the minds  
 “of the present and all succeeding generations  
 “in the following language,—viz. That James  
 “Read of Boston failed in business in March,  
 “1842, and was honorably discharged from all  
 “his debts; that his assignees paid to his credi-  
 “tors 86 cents on the dollar, leaving the sum



“ of \$50,000 of the debts unpaid, and that  
 “ Mr. Read by untiring zeal and stubborn per-  
 “ severance accumulated about \$50,000, and in  
 “ October, 1844, voluntarily paid to his creditors  
 “ the whole amount of his earnings, thereby can-  
 “ celling every moral as well as legal obligation.  
 “ What a glorious epitaph on any man’s Tomb-  
 “ stone! The recognition of moral obligation  
 “ that does not cease with the final operations  
 “ of Law: it teaches a lesson of Divine Au-  
 “ thority.

“ I hope you may receive from your friends  
 “ something more enduring than this feeble,  
 “ though sincere testimony of my consideration  
 “ and regard; and with best wishes for a pro-  
 “ longed life of prosperity and enjoyment in  
 “ your high reputation and the happiness of your  
 “ family, I beg you to accept the assurances with  
 “ which I remain, dear Sir, your sincere friend  
 “ and obt. Ser.

“ ABBOTT LAWRENCE

“ To JAMES READ, *Esq.*

“ *Franklin Place* ”

“ *Boston, October 7, 1844. (Monday)*

“ MY FRIEND AND NEIGHBOR: The interest and  
 “ excitement caused by last Saturday’s intelli-  
 “ gence was so great as to disable me in my *then*  
 “ *state* from expressing to you what I felt; and  
 “ *now* I can only trust myself with a word or  
 “ two, to express to you my *gratitude and thanks*  
 “ for the character you have stamped upon the  
 “ name of an ‘*old Boston Merchant*,’ while I  
 “ have the honor of bearing that name and  
 “ among the oldest *on hand*. That you should  
 “ have paid away the whole earnings of late  
 “ years, to make up the deficit in the assets of  
 “ your old concern, is not so surprising to those  
 “ who *have always* known you, as it is gratify-  
 “ ing that you have been so successful, and de-  
 “ lightful that we have *a brother* who has found  
 “ *here* something better than money. *I thank*  
 “ *you, my friend*, and desire most humbly and  
 “ devoutly to thank God for being spared to  
 “ *enjoy with you* this noble exemplification of  
 “ that elevated standard that makes ‘The good

“there is in riches to lie altogether in their use;  
 “like the woman’s box of ointment, if it be not  
 “broken and poured out for the refreshment of  
 “*Jesus Christ* in his distressed members, they  
 “lose their worth. The covetous man may, there-  
 “fore, truly write upon his rusting heaps, “These  
 “are good for nothing.”—The use *you have*  
 “made stamps a value upon this last *fifty thou-*  
 “*sand dollars* beyond and exceeding *any* fifty  
 “thousand *possessed or inherited* by any man in  
 “this city. I hope to be able to call and take  
 “you by the hand once more. Your friend and  
 “brother merchant,

“AMOS LAWRENCE

“JAMES READ, *Esq.*”

At a meeting of the creditors of the late firm of James Read & Co., held in Boston, on Saturday, October 12, 1844, for the purpose of testifying their sense of the recent honorable act of Mr. Read, the following statement was submitted:

“The house of James Read & Co. were forced  
 “by the disasters of the times, to suspend pay-

“ ment in the month of March, 1842, with an in-  
 “ debtedness of \$850,000, of which sum \$500,000  
 “ was secured by pledges of stock, and other  
 “ property, and paid in full, leaving \$350,000  
 “ to be provided for, from the assetts in the  
 “ hands of the assignee. From these assetts, ow-  
 “ ing greatly to the skill and fidelity with which  
 “ the estate was managed by the assignee, George  
 “ Morey, Esq., aided by the advice and judg-  
 “ ment of Mr. Read, the general creditors re-  
 “ ceived dividends amounting to eighty six per  
 “ cent upon their respective claims, and have  
 “ since, by the voluntary act of Mr. Read, who  
 “ had previously been legally and honorably  
 “ discharged, received from him the additional  
 “ fourteen per cent to make up to each creditor  
 “ the full amount of his claim. In token to Mr.  
 “ Read, that the creditors of his late house ap-  
 “ preciate his highly honorable conduct, in thus  
 “ appropriating to this object a sum amounting  
 “ to more than \$50,000, accumulated since his  
 “ failure from the fruits of his own well directed  
 “ industry, it is now by this meeting unani-  
 “ mously

“ *Resolved*, That it is due to Mr. Read, as well  
 “ as to ourselves and the whole Mercantile Com-  
 “ munity, that public notice should be taken of  
 “ this act of high integrity, and personal honor,  
 “ and that the thanks of this meeting, as well as  
 “ some testimonial of respect and approbation  
 “ be tendered to Mr. Read by his creditors.  
 “ *Resolved*, that

“ ABBOTT LAWRENCE	} <i>of</i> <i>Boston.</i>
“ CHAS. W. CARTWRIGHT	
“ JAMES W. PAIGE	
“ JAMES K. MILLS	
“ THOMAS B. CURTIS	
“ JOHN C. BROWN	} <i>of</i> <i>Providence.</i>
“ AMORY CHAPIN	
“ JACOB DUNNELL	
“ ELISHA DYER, JR.	

“ be a committee with full powers to make such  
 “ arrangements as in their judgments shall be  
 “ most proper for carrying the intentions of this  
 “ meeting into effect.

“ *Resolved*, that the proceedings of this meeting  
 “ be published in the city papers, and a copy

“thereof transmitted to Mr. Read, signed by  
“the Chairman and Secretary of this meeting.

“ABBOTT LAWRENCE

“*Chairman*

“CHAS. H. MILLS,

“*Secretary*”

On November 9, 1843, my father, Christopher Champlin Chadwick, married Louisa, the third daughter of James Read. In 1844 the firm of Read & Chadwick was formed to carry on the business of domestic goods commission-merchants, which at once entered upon a prosperous career owing to the reputation for probity and sagacity enjoyed by the senior member of the firm.

“*Boston, January 1, 1846*

“DEAR SIR: We herewith transmit to you a  
“service of plate, of which we ask your accept-  
“ance. We present this, not merely for the pur-  
“pose of complimenting you, but with a desire  
“to gratify ourselves by offering some enduring  
“token of our esteem for your character, and  
“of our interest in your welfare.



“ When, by reason of the general troubles of  
 “ 1841–42, you were obliged, in March of the  
 “ latter year, to yield to the pressure of adverse  
 “ circumstances, though to us the event was un-  
 “ expected, you well know you had our cordial  
 “ sympathy,—with no diminution of our friend-  
 “ ship and respect, won by a long course of hon-  
 “ orable dealing, uniform kindness of heart, and  
 “ generous liberality. Believing that no exer-  
 “ tions had been wanting on your part to pre-  
 “ vent this unfortunate result, we had confidence  
 “ that none would be wanting to do justice to  
 “ all your creditors. We trusted to your un-  
 “ doubted integrity and energy,—we felt that,  
 “ if pecuniary means were gone, ‘you had a cap-  
 “ ital in your character, which would carry you  
 “ triumphantly through the storm.’

“ You obtained from your creditors a full and  
 “ honorable discharge. The amount due at the  
 “ time of your failure was about eight hundred  
 “ and fifty thousand dollars. Of this about eight  
 “ hundred thousand dollars were realized from  
 “ the assets in bankruptcy. On the day when the



“ final dividend was made by the Assignee, you  
 “ nobly came forward and paid the balance,  
 “ amounting to over fifty thousand dollars, ac-  
 “ cumulated by untiring industry during the  
 “ two years and a half succeeding your misfor-  
 “ tunes.

“ In thus dispossessing yourself entirely of pro-  
 “ perty a second time, for the benefit of creditors,  
 “ you offered to the community an example of  
 “ high-souled honor, which we confess at first  
 “ took us by surprise. We considered, however,  
 “ that it was only in accordance with your well  
 “ known principles, yet we felt that some testi-  
 “ monial of our appreciation of such conduct was  
 “ due. We have, therefore, caused this plate to be  
 “ made and suitably inscribed,—that future  
 “ generations may learn from your example a  
 “ lesson, not only of strict integrity in their busi-  
 “ ness relations as merchants, but of lofty honor  
 “ in their social connection as men, and mem-  
 “ bers of one great family.

“ With our individual and united esteem, and  
 “ cordial wishes for your prosperity in whatever

“you may undertake, we are, dear Sir, sincerely  
“and respectfully your friends,

“ ABBOTT LAWRENCE	} Committee of Creditors.
“ JAMES K. MILLS	
“ J. W. PAIGE	
“ C. W. CARTWRIGHT	
“ THOS. B. CURTIS	

“ JAMES READ, *Esq.*”

Of this service of silver, which was large, it gives me pleasure to offer, in the name of the family, to the Hyde Park Historical Society an épergne, inscribed, as were all the pieces, “To James Read: A testimonial to his integrity as a merchant and honor as a man.”

In 1844 Edward Atkinson, now President of the Mutual Insurance Company, entered the office of Read & Chadwick as office boy. At my solicitation he has kindly supplemented a brief letter addressed to my aunt, Miss Sarah E. Read, in 1885, with some reminiscences of Mr. Read and his firm as he knew them at that time.

“*Boston, February 7, 1885*

“DEAR MISS READ: Among all the pictures of  
“old friends now being collected for our office,  
“not one will be valued so much by myself per-  
“sonally as that of your father.

“I stood by him when he paid that dividend  
“which was only called for by his own sense of  
“integrity, when old Job Eddy, a Quaker cre-  
“ditor, held up both hands as if he were asking  
“a blessing, saying, ‘Why, James, does thee pay  
“the whole?’

“I cannot give the tone of voice in which this  
“sentence was spoken, but I shall never forget  
“the lesson.

“I shall venture to make myself known to you  
“when I meet you, not being now as shy as I  
“was when I was one of ‘the boys’ in the store.

“Sincerely yours,

“EDWARD ATKINSON”

*Reminiscences of James Read*

“I WAS a boy of less than sixteen when I en-  
“tered the store of Read & Chadwick in Liberty

“ Square. My brother George, still living, was  
 “ the bookkeeper. He had been with the firm  
 “ of James Read & Company that had failed  
 “ shortly before, and the affairs were being set-  
 “ tled under the National Bankrupt Act of 1842  
 “ by Messrs. George Morey and Daniel Ham-  
 “ mond, assignees. The firm of Read & Chad-  
 “ wick had been formed. Shortly after, we moved  
 “ from Liberty Square to the Bowdoin Block  
 “ in Milk Street.

“ Among the incidents that I recall in Liberty  
 “ Square was the finding of tickets for the Ded-  
 “ ham mill sheeting, sold by the firm, that had  
 “ been used almost down to that date ‘*warranted*  
 “ *woven on the power loom.*’ So near to my own  
 “ beginning had been the introduction of the  
 “ power loom.

“ Another incident I recall. Probably the last  
 “ species of calico ever printed in this country  
 “ with one color put in by hand, in what was  
 “ known as ‘block printing,’ was done in this mill.  
 “ I can recall the pattern now, and if I could draw  
 “ and paint could duplicate it. It was printed by

“ Benjamin Cozzens in Rhode Island.

“ That was before the days of porters. We boys  
 “ opened the store, swept the lofts, built the  
 “ fires, got the counting room ready, and then  
 “ went home to breakfast. We also closed up  
 “ the store in Liberty Square, opposite that of  
 “ A. & A. Lawrence & Company. One win-  
 “ ter’s night, the snow on the ground, my old  
 “ friend, Ned Cunningham, coming out from  
 “ A. & A. Lawrence & Company, saw the gas  
 “ firing up in our counting room. I had locked  
 “ up without putting out the gas. He went  
 “ round to Mr. Read’s house in Franklin Street,  
 “ and poor Mr. Chadwick was obliged to go  
 “ down, open the door, put out the gas and take  
 “ the keys back. All the notice that I got from  
 “ him was a message through another boy that  
 “ ‘he hoped I would put the gas out when I  
 “ closed the store.’ Mr. Chadwick had my alle-  
 “ giance in full as long as he lived.

“ Mr. Read had many old-fashioned ideas that  
 “ were extremely useful, although rather hard  
 “ on the boys. He would not even permit a copy-

“ing press to be used, although they were then  
 “in common use. He drafted the letters, and a  
 “part of my work was to write them out and  
 “hand them to him to be signed; or else more  
 “often, he wrote them out with his own hand,  
 “and a part of my work was to copy them by  
 “hand in the letter book, not a bad lesson for  
 “a boy. I learned good forms of business cor-  
 “respondence.

“One incident occurred while we were on Milk  
 “Street. We had sold some goods for shipment  
 “to South America, and it shows how little we  
 “knew of gold that when we were notified  
 “that four hundred dollars (\$400) was coming  
 “by vessel from South America to Boston in  
 “remittance for the goods, I received orders to  
 “take a hand-cart and go down to get it. It was  
 “the days of hand-carts, and our excellent por-  
 “ter, Hathaway, was sent down to get the gold  
 “without the hand-cart.

“After perhaps a couple of years of good suc-  
 “cess in the firm, the assignees of James Read  
 “& Company made up their final account, I



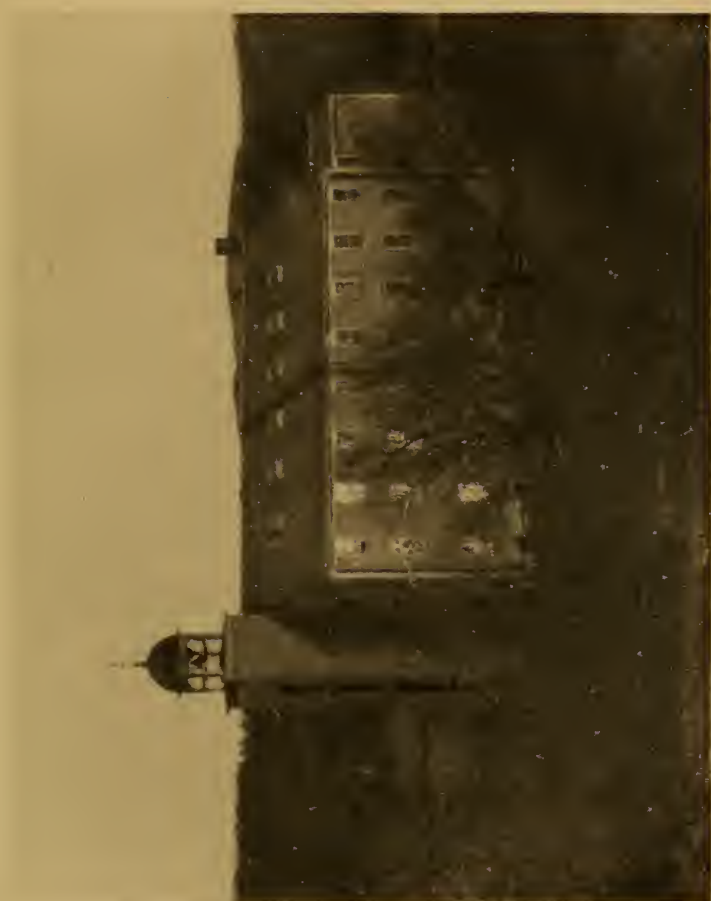
“ think having paid to the creditors in all about  
 “ eighty-seven and a half per cent. It was at  
 “ this time Mr. Read, having been successful  
 “ in the new firm, made up his mind to pay his  
 “ creditors in full with interest. I have later been  
 “ informed that he first consulted his wife and  
 “ daughters, telling them how completely it  
 “ would take from him all that he had made;  
 “ but he was sustained by them, and he acted  
 “ upon his determination. I think that I wrote  
 “ out the sheet and prepared the checks. At any  
 “ rate, I stood by him in the inner counting  
 “ room as each creditor was invited to enter and  
 “ to receive this wholly unexpected payment,  
 “ and it is to that I referred in the note which  
 “ I am informed will be printed.

“ I remained five years with the firm, and then  
 “ went out at a little over twenty-one to be-  
 “ gin the work of getting a living, but Mr. Read  
 “ was my friend and adviser as long as he lived.  
 “ I often had occasion to consult him while act-  
 “ ing as treasurer of many corporations, and al-  
 “ ways found his advice safe and prudent. He



“ was the founder of the Mutual Insurance  
 “ Company, of which I am now President, and  
 “ his photograph is one of those with which our  
 “ Directors’ room is adorned, and it brings back  
 “ the memory of himself and his associates when-  
 “ ever we hold our meetings there.

“ I have one reminiscence of the old Dedham  
 “ mill, one of the oldest cotton factories in the  
 “ country, of which Mr. Read was the treasurer.  
 “ James Downing was the agent, a skilful man  
 “ of his day. Cotton was carried out on a wagon  
 “ and the goods brought in by wagon by old  
 “ James Crosby, another singular character. One  
 “ day a letter came from some one at the mill  
 “ which I have never forgotten. The spelling  
 “ corresponded somewhat to the composition;  
 “ there were no stops. It read thus: ‘Deth has  
 “ been doin his work among us agin and taken  
 “ one of our best weavers last Wednesday she  
 “ worked in the mill and today is borne away  
 “ to the shadowy tomb such is life only if I have  
 “ misunderstood Mr. Crosby about the peace of  
 “ cloth for sample please to rite.’ This letter



OLD DEDHAM MILL



“amused me much, and I think it amused Mr.  
“Read.

“As I understand this memorandum to be for  
“the Readville Association, I may mention the  
“fact that Mr. Read was also Treasurer of the  
“firm who were the selling agents of the North-  
“folk Mill of which Ezra W. Taft was a long  
“time agent. In this mill finer goods were made  
“than in the old Dedham Mill. They were for  
“printing calicos before the customary stand-  
“ard of a print cloth had been established. As  
“I recall these goods they were 29” wide, the  
“present standard being 27”. They were of finer  
“yarn and a closer texture, and made a much  
“better calico than the common calico now  
“made.

“I cannot recall other incidents that it would  
“be worth while to put on paper.

“In summing up, my memory of James Read  
“is of a man who had not enjoyed the benefit  
“of what is commonly called education except  
“in the common school. He developed through  
“experience and practice a strong character of

“ highest integrity, great tact, and unimpeach-  
 “ able honesty, as witnessed by what he did. He  
 “ had the good manners which are the natural  
 “ expression of kind feelings and kindly thought,  
 “ so much more to be admired than the ordinary  
 “ conventional type of what are called good  
 “ manners in society. He has left upon my mind  
 “ the pleasant memory of a kind and judicious  
 “ employer, a good adviser and a strong friend.  
 “ I now recall an item of interest in your grand-  
 “ father’s career. He lent Otis Tufts of East  
 “ Boston money by which to establish his works  
 “ when he invented and set up in the Fifth Ave-  
 “ nue Hotel, New York, the first elevator, op-  
 “ erated not by apparatus working above, but  
 “ by the large shaft pushing up from below: ex-  
 “ actly how it was then operated I know not,  
 “ but this fact is quite clear in my recollection.  
 “ I think it was a big screw.

“ EDWARD ATKINSON

“ *Boston, April 5, 1905* ”

I have been unable to ascertain at what date  
 Mr. Read became a large stockholder in the old

cotton mill in Readville, its treasurer, and his firm its selling agents, but it cannot have been later than 1846–1847. From the Records of this Historical Society (vol. ii, p. 30), I take the following: “The locality now known as Readville was as early as 1655 called the ‘Low Plain’ (1 *Dorch. Rec.* 103), and after it became a part of Dedham was for years known by the name of ‘Dedham Low Plain.’ When the school district was there established it naturally came to be known as the Low Plain District. This name evidently became distasteful to its residents. Mr. Edmund Davis states in his excellent historical sketch that ‘about 1850 it was named by its inhabitants Readville in honor of Mr. Read, who was the principal owner of the cotton mill there.’

“Does not the following extract taken from the school records fix the date of the adoption of the name beyond a reasonable doubt? ‘Oct. 8, 1847. Voted that the name of Low Plain School District be changed to that of Readville.’ The mill at that time was owned by a Corpo-



ration called the Dedham Manufacturing Company."

With credit and a reputation for integrity, thus acquired, the firm of Read & Chadwick entered upon great prosperity, weathering the panic of 1857 which overwhelmed so many of the strong commercial houses of the country. My father's health, however, gave way under strain of that critical year, so that he was obliged to retire from the firm in 1859, his place being taken by ex-Governor Henry J. Gardner. Mr. Read, although in vigorous health, retired from active business shortly after, and devoted the last years of his life to the care of his estate.

On March 5, 1865, Mrs. James Read died.

The last incident of interest that I can recall occurred at a reception given in Boston to the philanthropist George Peabody, in 1869, by his former partner, James M. Beebe. When Mr. Read entered the room, Mr. Peabody grasped him by the hand, and said, "Mr. Read, I want to say to you that *you* laid the foundation of my fortune. I came to Boston as a lad, without a cent of

money, but having heard of an opportunity to sell at a profit \$3000 worth of goods in Philadelphia. I went to you, explained the circumstances; although you knew nothing of me, you let me have the goods on credit, and started me on my career."

I have often regretted that Mr. Peabody did not evince, at the end of his life, as practical a manifestation of his obligations to Mr. Read and his descendants as did Mr. Pickins.

On December 24, 1870, Mr. Read died, at the age of eighty-one years, of an acute affection of the stomach.

His advanced age had been unusually free from infirmity. His elastic step, his cheerful greetings, and his broad charity and open-handed benevolence marked the evenings of his days.

Probity and sagacity as a merchant, benevolence as a man, were his chief characteristics. The judicial character of his mind caused him to be often selected in business affairs, and in the more personal relations of the Temple Club, as elsewhere, as the arbiter in disputes. His verdicts were

invariably accepted by both contending parties as just and equitable. In his will he bequeathed liberally to the various charitable organizations in which he had been interested during his life, and provided abundantly for his family.













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